



# THE NATIONAL PREACHER.

Third Series.]

MARCH, 1863.

Vol. II.—No. 3.

## SERMON III.

BY REV. GEORGE B. IDE, D.D.,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

### DUTY, INDIVIDUAL AND IMPERATIVE.

"WHAT is that to thee? Follow thou me."—JOHN 21: 22.

SUCH was the rebuke which our Lord addressed to Peter for neglecting his own duty, while inopportunately concerning himself about the duty of another. The Saviour had commanded the Apostle to follow him. The Apostle, having risen up to obey, turned around and saw John also following; and being the same impulsive and variable creature that he had ever been, his curiosity was at once excited, and his thoughts diverted from the service required of himself to the question of what should be the course of John, and what particular part Christ had assigned him to perform. Hence, instead of going forward directly in his own work, he stood still and asked: "Lord, what shall this man do?"

To this unseasonable inquiry our text is the answer. It is as if Christ had said: "Your question is entirely irrelevant. What John shall do has no connection with your responsibility. Your

duty is personal, present, imperative, and independent of the state and conduct of all others. I have commanded you to follow me. It is yours to obey, directly, unhesitatingly, and for yourself, without being influenced by what those around you may do or not do."

Such was the scope of the text as it was originally spoken. But apart from this special application, it contains a general truth of great and vital importance. It teaches us that our obligation to obey and serve Christ is individual, immediate, and unchanged by any obstacles that may arise from the deportment of others, or from the delusions of our own minds.

Many there are who, when urged to follow Christ by embracing his salvation, and devoting their hearts and lives to his cause, allow themselves to be deterred by some inquiry foreign to their duty, or by some real or imagined difficulty with which they have no practical concern. Such may be found, in great numbers, both among those who profess to be religious, and those who have never submitted to the claims of the Redeemer. To each of these classes the text conveys a most appropriate admonition. For the sake of brevity, however, I shall leave the former wholly out of view, and confine myself exclusively to the latter. It is my wish to address those unconverted persons who refuse to comply with the overtures of the Gospel, until every extraneous question which they can ask is settled, and every fancied impediment which they can conjecture removed out of their way.

I. The first class which I shall mention, as coming under this description, consists of those who hesitate to yield themselves to Christ, because they can not understand all that the Bible contains.

It admits not of question that there are in the Scriptures some "things hard to be understood"—deep and inscrutable problems which no human intellect can solve. This results necessarily from the weakness of our faculties, and the infinite nature of the subjects of which Revelation treats. It is to be expected that our feeble reason, which meets a thousand enigmas even in the affairs of this life, should find itself baffled and confounded whenever it attempts to grasp the mighty secrets of eternity. But "what is that to thee?" These mysteries belong only to the field of speculative truth—to those recondite matters of the celestial world which are wholly dis severed from thy present wants and duties. All that is practical, all that relates to the condition of man as a sinner, to the method of his recovery by the atoning death and justifying righteousness of Christ, and to the obligations which press upon him in these circumstances, is entirely plain and simple. How irrational is it for men to reject blessings of which they have a conscious need, and to disregard commands which they know and can comprehend, because there may be other points connected

with them which their limited powers can not fully explore! You would ridicule the folly of him who should refuse necessary food until he could trace out all the hidden processes of digestion and nutrition. Not less absurd are you in refusing to become religious because you can not unravel all the mysteries of religion. There is no difficulty in any thing that is essential to your salvation. You know, both from the Bible and from your own consciousness, that you are guilty and condemned; that you have broken the divine law, and are liable to eternal death. This you can understand. You know that God, though just and holy, is full of mercy to the children of men, and that he has given his Only-Begotten Son to be their Redeemer, and to open by his obedience and sufferings a way for their deliverance. This you can understand. You know, too—for the Gospel emphatically proclaims it—that if you repent and believe in Christ, you shall be pardoned and saved. This you can understand. Then do it. Go at once to the Saviour and commit your everlasting interests to his hands. This you can do, and this is all you need do. Whatever obscurity may appear to your dim vision to hang over the higher realms of truth, the fact of salvation by faith in Christ is clear and intelligible to the weakest capacity. There is here no darkness, no mystery. All is distinct and palpable as the day. What madness, then, is it to turn away from the gracious offers of the Gospel, from the plain duties that are vital to your happiness, because the scheme of redemption, which propounds those offers and prescribes those duties, may involve other topics too vast for your comprehension!

'An emigrant is journeying across the great American Desert to the Land of Gold and the Clime of the Sun. He is perishing with thirst. The scanty supply of water which he took with him has long been exhausted, and for many weary miles no spring or brook, and not even a stagnant pool left from the winter snows, has met his eye. Nothing is visible wherever he looks but the blazing sky above, and the hot, arid waste around, brown with drought, or white with drifting salt. With staggering limbs, and parched lips, and swollen tongue, and brain on fire, he drags himself forward, battling with death, yet feeling that he must soon give over the struggle. At length, just as he is about to abandon all further effort, and lie down in despair to die, his ear, rendered acute by suffering, catches the low, faint murmur of a distant stream. Hope and the love of life revive at the sound, and with all his remaining strength he hurries towards it. As he comes near, he sees a spring of water gushing out, cool and clear, from the side of a rocky bluff, splashing and sparkling in its little basin, and gliding away in a gurgling rill. But just as he is on the point of putting his lips to it, and quenching his thirst with full draughts, he stops and says to himself: "Whence does this water come? Is it from rain falling on the mountain-top, percolating

down through the fissures in the rocks, and bubbling out in the stream which I see? Or does its birthplace lie in some secret fountain deep in the heart of the earth? I do not know, and I will not drink of it till I do know." And so he turns away to encounter again the horrors of the dry and burning desert.

Do you tell me that fatuity so monstrous is impossible? In relation to the supply of bodily wants it may be, but not in relation to the needs of the soul. Your own conduct is the strict moral parallel of the case I have supposed. You are in peril of dying from spiritual thirst. The necessities of your immortal nature can not be met by any thing within yourself, or in the world around you. But God has opened a Fountain. Christ has said: "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." The waters of Salvation, welling forth from the Mercy-seat above, have descended in copious floods to refresh and bless the earth. And will you refuse to drink of the River of Life which flows full and free before you, proffering health and gladness to your famished soul, because you can not discover every thing pertaining to its source far, far away in the recesses of the Eternal Mind?

In one of those financial convulsions which so often sweep over the land, you have lost your all. Property and occupation are alike gone. The hoardings of former years are spent, and you have borrowed and borrowed till you have not a neighbor or acquaintance who would not go a mile out of his way to avoid you. Dig you can not, for there are none to hire you. To beg is useless, for there are none to give you. For days, weeks, you have scarcely tasted wholesome food, and famine, gaunt and inexorable, stares you in the face. In this hour of your utmost need, an old friend, your father's friend, and your own friend in better times, meets you, and looking pitifully into your dim eye, and at your haggard cheek, lays his hand on your shoulder, and says: "Come home with me to dinner." You go with him to a splendid mansion. You enter a large and richly furnished dining-hall. You see before you a long table loaded with food in every variety, from the plainest to the most luxurious. At the lower end, where you stand, the dishes are all simple, nutritious, solid, precisely such as your famishing state demands. And every dish is open, showing its contents at a glance. But farther on, towards the head of the board, there are dishes of a more complicated character, reserved for a later stage of the feast; and these are covered, some with covers of tin, some with covers of silver, and some with covers of gold. Your host bids you welcome, and presses you most affectionately to sit down at once and satisfy your hunger. But instead of thankfully accepting his offer, you look along the table, and ask: "What is under those covers yonder?" Your friend replies that those dishes are not suited to your present necessities, that they belong to the dessert; and that when you get

to them, he will take the covers off. And again he urges you to partake of his bounty. But you draw yourself up haughtily, wrap your ragged garments about you, and exclaiming, "I'll not sit down to a table of mysteries," walk out into the cold, dark street, amid the howling storm, alone with your pride and your starvation.

Let me impress this point by yet another illustration. A man falls into a deep well in the cellar of a lofty building, and, without help, must inevitably be drowned. From the ceiling above a rope is let down to him through the hatchway, and friendly voices call to him to seize hold of it, while strong arms are ready to draw him out. But instead of doing this, he complains that he can not see the upper end of the rope, and does not know how it is secured. Those who are trying to rescue him tell him not to trouble himself about the upper end; they will take care of that; they have it fast to a beam in the roof; his business is to make sure of the lower end. Then he stops to ask, with what kind of a knot the rope is fastened, and what sort of timber the beam is made of to which it is attached. Thus, while neglecting the rope, he continues to cry, "How is it tied? How is it tied?" till the waters close over him, and his vain questions are smothered in death!

Do you say that such a man would be a fool? Take heed, dear hearer, that thou be not a greater fool. Thou hast fallen into a well, a deep and loathsome well—"the horrible pit and miry clay" of impenitence and sin; and thou art in danger every moment of sinking down, down forever into "the bottomless pit" of hell beneath. God has flung out from heaven the golden cord, the three-fold cord, of the Covenant of Mercy. He has made one end of it fast to the pillars of his throne, while the other reaches to thee; and he bids thee lay hold of it, and he will draw thee up out of the slough of thy pollutions to the purity and bliss of his own presence. Dost thou answer, that the upper part of the cord is above thy sight, and that thou canst not perceive all the processes by which it has been secured? "What is that to thee?" Enough for thee to know that the rope is fast, that the rope is strong, able to bear thy weight, and that of millions like thee. O sinner! grasp the rope—lay hold of it by faith—cling to it by prayer—and thou shalt mount up, as on angels' wings, to the Paradise of God; and there, safe from the yawning abyss, thou mayest ponder through eternity the strength of the rope, and the infinite wisdom displayed in the mysteries of its adjustment.

II. A second class refuse to repent and believe in Christ, because they do not know how they became sinners; or, in other words, can not comprehend the origin of moral evil.

The entrance of sin into the world is, indeed, a question that has



baffled the profoundest minds. God has not seen fit to answer it; and therefore, it must remain, in the present state of our faculties, unexplained and inexplicable. That the Almighty could have prevented the fall of our first parents, and the consequent corruption and ruin entailed upon their posterity, we can not doubt; and the only reason we dare assign why he did not do it, is, that having resolved to govern the world by moral, not physical force, in restraining men from sin by an act of absolute power, he would have destroyed their free agency, and thus have subverted the whole system of administration which he had established. He therefore deemed it best, on the whole, to suffer evil to exist, determined ultimately to overrule it for his own glory and the highest good of the universe. This conjecture, though probable, can not claim to be an adequate solution; and human sagacity, after all its efforts, must leave the subject where it found it—among the incomprehensible things of Divine Sovereignty.

But "what is that to thee?" You are a sinner, however you became so. This is the naked, actual fact with which you have to do. By nature and by practice you are the enemy of God, estranged from him in heart and in life, and exposed to the penalty of that holy law which proclaims: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The disease is within you, preying upon your very vitals; and infinitely more important is it for you to know how it may be cured, than how it arose. And, blessed be God, there is no obscurity here. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin." In the atoning sacrifice offered on Calvary, a remedy has been provided for transgression; and whoever accepts that sacrifice in contrition and faith, shall be purified from guilt and absolved from punishment. This remedy is proffered, without money and without price, to all who are willing to receive it. No philosophy is needed to understand it, no science to apply it. Its only mystery is this—look and live, believe and be saved. And will you neglect a provision so simple, so easy, so efficacious, because you can not ascertain exactly in what manner you came to need it? That you do need it, is a great and fearful reality. Without it you are lost forever. Oh! what infatuation, to stand still and dispute about the parentage of sin, while sin itself, actual sin, personal sin, willful sin, sin multiplied into a thousand forms and shapes of aggravation, is hurrying you down to the second death!

A city at midnight is roused by an alarm of fire. The bells ring out their startling summons. The engines thunder along the streets. A stately mansion is burning. From roof, and gable, and casement, and balcony, the maddening flames leap forth, dyeing the heavens with blood, and shedding a lurid glare on the upturned faces of the crowds below. Soon it is whispered that in one of the highest chambers of the building there is a man asleep,

and at the mercy of the conflagration. A thrill of horror goes through the multitude. What shall be done? The stairways and passages are all in a blaze. Every avenue of escape seems cut off. A bold fireman seizes a ladder and places it against the window of the room occupied by the unconscious victim. Up, up he mounts through blinding smoke and rushing flame, for it is life that he goes to save. He reaches the window—he dashes it in, and calls upon the sleeper to come forth and descend. But the heedless inmate, instead of complying, raises himself on his elbow, rubs his eyes, and asks: “How on earth the house came on fire!” Fool! idiot! is the answer—no matter now how the house came on fire; it is on fire; and you will be burned up if you wait to find out in what way the fire caught. Still he insists that he can not go till he has satisfied himself whether the fire was communicated by accident or by design; from a candle borne by some careless hand, or from the torch of the incendiary. And while he lingers in this bootless quest, roaming from room to room, over shaking floors and beneath tottering rafters, the roof falls in, the walls collapse, and he is buried under the blazing ruins.

O sinner! such is thy conduct, and such will be thy fate, unless thou art wise in time. Thy house, the house of thy soul, is on fire. No matter whether man or devil kindled the flame—kindled it is, and is wrapping thy whole nature in its destroying embrace. It has spread to every faculty and to every affection. Body, mind, and heart are alike pervaded by it. It smoulders in the workings of inward depravity. It blazes out in the lawlessness of open transgression. And this fire of sin, unless quenched by the blood of Christ, will soon become the fire of judgment, the fire of God's wrath, the fire of hell, that shall burn forever. As yet there is hope for thee. The waters of mercy are flowing by. The Refuge of the Gospel stands open. Oh! flee before it be too late. Escape for thy life—look not behind thee lest thou be consumed. Stop not to ask how the fire originated. It will be time enough for such inquiries when the fire is put out, and thou hast reached the Sanctuary above, whither it can never come.

III. Another class hold back from coming to any decision on the great matter of their salvation, because there is such a diversity of religious opinions in the world.

This is an excuse often urged. It is a very common thing for unconverted persons, when exhorted to give heed to their spiritual welfare, to reply that they know not what to believe; that amid the conflict of sects and creeds, each asserting its own infallibility, and denouncing all others, it is impossible to tell which is right and which wrong; and that, therefore, they deem it their wisest course to attend to their temporal interests, and let religion alone altogether.

But you seem to overlook the fact, that the adoption of such a rule would cut you off from having any thing to do with the affairs of this world, no less than with those of the next. Men differ as frequently and as widely about secular matters as they do about religion. In politics, in law, in medicine, in trade, in agriculture, in science, in all departments of thought and occupation, they hold the most dissimilar opinions, and carry them out into lines of practice equally dissimilar. You can scarcely find two individuals who will take precisely the same view of the simplest proposition, or be fully agreed as to the best mode of doing even the most common thing. The minds of men are so differently constituted; their intellectual endowments are so unequal, their powers of perception so unlike; each is so enveloped in a haze of prepossessions and prejudices, and so inclined to look at all subjects from his own personal standpoint—that the marvel is, not that men should differ, but that they should ever agree. So that, if you are determined to have nothing to do with religion because contradictory theories are advanced respecting it, you must, to be consistent, keep yourself aloof from every pursuit and business in life.

As a matter of fact, however, you greatly overrate the real diversity of religious sentiment which exists among those whose opinions are entitled to any regard. It is a thing naturally to be looked for that unregenerate men, following blindly the impulses of their depravity, hating God and God's revealed word, should either wholly reject the great doctrines of the Gospel, or pervert them to suit their own sinful desires and passions. Their love alike of present indulgence and of future safety leads them instinctively to dissent from whatever might seem to interrupt the one, or to endanger the other. And the forms of unbelief or of wrong belief which they embrace, will be as changeful and belligerent as the corrupt propensities from which they spring. The ungodly world is thus a vast caldron where all the ingredients of wickedness are seething together, and ever and anon sending up to the surface bubbles of falsehood of every shape and color. But among those who have been enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit of Grace, there is a substantial agreement on all the fundamental truths of Christianity. They may separate in outward things, in modes of organization, and forms of worship; but in all that is intrinsically important, they are undivided. The vital teachings of the Bible with respect to the depravity of man, the atonement of Christ, the necessity of repentance and faith, the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit, the eternal happiness of the righteous, the eternal misery of the wicked, are universally held by all real Christians throughout the world. And it has ever been so. The people of God, of all names, of all countries, of all ages, bear here one harmonious testimony. I listen to the voices of patriarchs



and prophets coming down to me from the far-off centuries; and what do I hear? "Salvation by the blood of a crucified Jesus." I listen to the voices of apostles and evangelists, speaking to me from the pages of the New Testament; and what do I hear? "Salvation by the blood of a crucified Jesus." I listen to the voices of the confessors and martyrs of the Reformation; and what do I hear? "Salvation by the blood of a crucified Jesus." I listen to the voices of all the pious in our own day, of every denomination, and in every land; and I find them to be in perfect unison, proclaiming, without one discordant note: "Salvation by the blood of a crucified Jesus."

But supposing this were not the case; supposing the differences of doctrinal belief among Christians were as numerous and as broad as you imagine them to be—"what is that to thee?" To your own Master you must stand or fall. The Saviour requires you to follow him, to embrace his Gospel, and fulfill its laws, regardless of what the whole world beside may believe or do. His Word is your only guide. It marks out the path you are to take with such clearness and precision, that only they who willfully shut their eyes can fail to see it. With such light to direct your steps, the uncertainty and confusion of human opinions can furnish you no excuse for indecision and delay. No—amid all the windings of error, the finger of Eternal Truth points ever straight onward to the Cross of Christ; and high above all the Babel-tongues of delusion, crying, "Lo! here, and lo! there"—its voice is heard, saying: "This is the way, walk ye in it." Oh! when you stand at the judgment-seat, and the Bible, which you now neglect, shall follow you there as an accusing witness, think you the plea that you knew not what to believe will avail you? Make not now a defense which you will not dare to make then; but, taking the Book of God into thy hands, with lowly prayer for the Spirit's teaching, examine for thyself, decide for thyself, and thou shalt find rest to thy soul.

IV. The last class which I shall notice justify their indifference to religion, by the alleged inconsistency and unfaithfulness of its professors.

Not seldom is the assumption put forth, that the avowed disciples of Christ differ in nothing from the mass of the ungodly around them; and hence, that religion is but a sham, and its votaries, fanatics or hypocrites. To this we reply, that the charge, in the extent in which it is made, is utterly untrue. Doubtless, corrupt members may be found in the Church of God—men whose hearts have never been renewed, and who wear the mask of piety as a screen to the wickedness of their lives. This is to be expected; for in this fallen world no vigilance can guard even the most sacred retreats from the intrusion of the unworthy. We also ac-

knowledge with sadness, that the standard of Christian practice is no where as elevated as the Gospel demands; that many, whose sincerity can not be questioned, often wander from the right way, or follow it with sluggish step; while all are more or less subject to frailty — frailty which they themselves are soonest to perceive and confess. Alas! perfect holiness dwells not now in our sin-blighted sphere. But, with all these deductions, we claim that Christians are "the salt of the earth." Though not as good as they ought to be, they are incomparably better than any body else. In integrity, in deference to conscience, in purity of motive, in uprightness of life, in philanthropic deeds, they are raised far above the profane crowd that reproaches and vilifies them. And this is one of the reasons why wrong-doing, when it does appear among them, is so marked. With the irreligious, wrong-doing is the rule, and is too common to be noticed; with the pious, it is the exception, and is on that account the more gazed at. No one heeds the smut on a collier's frock; but a stain on the white robe of beauty attracts every eye.

Oh! it is a slander, fabricated by Satan, "the accuser of the brethren," that Christians are not better than other men. As a body, they are the best men the world has ever seen; and to their influence is owing every thing good which has been done in the world. Christians not better than other men! Who have kept the truth and died for it, when all others disowned it? Christians. Who founded our political and religious institutions, our schools, and colleges, and churches, the safeguard and glory of the land? Christians. Who, by their teachings and example, purify public sentiment, and create a moral tone in society, without which it would become a den of thieves? Christians. Who visit hospitals and prisons, and go down into the dark, filthy homes of vice and want, seeking out the wretched, succoring the helpless, saving the lost? Christians. Who uphold the Sabbath and the Sanctuary, and keep the light of the Gospel burning on the watch-towers of Zion, to guide the benighted to safety and peace? Christians. Who are carrying that light to pagan shores, and kindling up its fires under the sky of the Equator, and amid the snows of the Pole? Christians. Who are the world's foremost leaders in its great exodus from barbarism, bondage, and woe, to civilization, freedom, and happiness? Again I say, Christians. Look at any work that honors God and blesses man, and you will find that Christians devise it, Christians superintend it, Christians do it. Christians not better than other men! And dare you say this — you who never felt the power of one Christian principle? Christians not better than you! The Christian fears God. You live as if there were no God. The Christian mourns over his sins. You glory in yours. The Christian prays. You swear. The Christian loves the assemblies of the saints. You love the theater, the dram-shop, and the brothel. The Christian labors for the salva-

tion of his fellow-men. You labour to prevent it. Oh! you do not, you can not believe that the Christian is not better than you. You only wish it, and the wish is father to the thought. But whether you now believe it or not, be assured, that in the great day of decision, when all characters shall be revealed, you will discover that the moral distance between you and the most imperfect follower of the meek and lowly Jesus is as wide as from hell to heaven. "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

Granting, however, for the moment, that your allegation were just; that the great majority of religious professors in our day were false to their calling, and false to their God; and that our churches of every name had degenerated into synagogues of mere hypocrisy and formalism—"what is that to thee?" This fact could furnish no apology for your own unbelief and impenitence. It could not take one iota from your individual accountability, nor lessen in the slightest degree your obligation to follow the Saviour. The command would still rest upon you in all its force. The Gospel itself, and not the conduct of its professors, would still be the law by which you are to act, and the standard by which you are to be judged. It would still remain an unchangeable truth, that "he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." Oh! if you die without conversion, will it lighten either your guilt or your doom to know that others pretended to be converted, and were not? Nay, rather will it not aggravate both? Will not the Judge say to you: "Out of thine own mouth do I condemn thee. If thou knewest so well what my disciples should be, why didst thou not thyself become my disciple?" And when the sentence shall be pronounced, and you lie down in sorrow, will it mitigate your anguish to know that the hypocrites whom you so hated on earth are your companions for eternity? No, no—your sin is your own, your punishment will be your own, and you alone must bear it.

Dear hearer, how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? How long wilt thou cleave to thy refuges of lies? How long wilt thou bolster thyself up with objections that have no existence but in thine own depraved heart? Cast them all away. They are empty, false, and will vanish before the light of eternity, as the mist is swept from the mountain's top by the morning beam. Go to Christ in humility and faith, and surrender thyself to the leading of his grace. Listen to no voice but his—that voice which now sounds to thee out of heaven, as once it sounded by the blue waters of Genesareth: "Follow me." And then, when the last decisive day is past, and the Saviour, having received "his own" to himself, shall ascend from the throne of judgment to the throne of his everlasting glory, thou shalt hear that same voice calling to thee, amid the harpings of angels: "FOLLOW ME."

## SERMON IV.

BY REV. DR. NELSON,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ST. LOUIS.

### PREVALENT PRAYER.

"THE effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."—JAMES 5 : 16.

THERE is probably nothing connected with practical religion, in regard to which there has been more of superstition on the one hand, and of skepticism on the other, than prayer.

The sad tendency of the human mind to rest in that which is formal and visible, and to stop short of that which is internal and essential, is here strongly exemplified, when men, forgetting that God is a spirit, and must be worshiped in spirit and in truth, expect to win his favor by bodily kneelings, and verbal utterance of forms of prayer, without regard to the condition of their souls.

People who are under the influence of such superstition, estimate their own piety by the number and length of their prayers. Among the Mohammedans and some corrupt Christian sects, this superstition is carried to an extent that is almost incredible to us. With them, we are told, that a man may pray much, and be esteemed very devout, who is at the same time practicing gross crimes. His prayers are not supposed to have any less value on account of his wickedness, nor are they expected to have any effect to keep him from wickedness.

How utterly destitute must such minds be of any true conception of prayer, as the intercourse of the soul with God: or else of any right conception of God, as a pure and holy Being!

On the other hand, there is a vast amount of skepticism in regard to prayer. Thinking men, intelligent men, of course see that such ideas of prayer as I have mentioned are absurd and vain. Some such persons, setting themselves to speculate upon the subject, and not submitting their speculations to the guidance of the Bible, find themselves unable to see how prayer can be of any use. "It can not change the purpose of God," they say. "It can not alter that course of events which he has appointed." "He is too great to be moved—too high to be reached—too firm to be influenced by our poor petitions." And so they "restrain prayer" in themselves, and chill into prayerlessness all who give up their minds to the guidance of their philosophy.

It is perhaps a sufficient answer to such speculations, to ask

their authors, whether it is any more reasonable for us to expect that, on condition of our digging and mellowing the ground and putting seeds into it, the Creator will open those little seeds, and fetch an abundant harvest out of them; or that, on condition of our putting certain kinds of food into our mouths, he will put forth his energy to change it into blood, and muscle, and bones, for the upbuilding of these bodies; or that, on condition of our stretching a wire across the continent, and adjusting certain metals and fluids, according to an arrangement which he has appointed, we may write our message, and he will, in the twinkling of an eye, by an instantaneous, imperceptible thrill along that wire, cause the message to be faithfully written at the other end of it, on the other side of the continent—whether it is any more reasonable to believe that God will put forth his almighty power for us, to do such things, on such conditions, than that he will put forth the same power to help us and to bless us, on condition of our asking him to do so.

I say, this might be a sufficient answer to such speculations. Certainly it would show that there really is no less difficulty in harmonizing the unchangeableness of God's purposes, with the utility of man's labor, than with the efficacy of man's prayers.

Likely it will quite generally be found, that there is in the same minds really as much skepticism in the one respect as in the other. Those who think it absurd to pray to God do not really see his hand and his working in those wonders by which he seeks to make himself known. They do not recognize the living God—but only a blind mechanical thing which they call nature—in those wonderful and mysterious processes to which I have alluded. It is not far from Deism to Atheism. It is not much better to believe in a God who will not hear our prayers, than not to believe in any God at all. Not much better in its effect upon us, and not much more philosophical.

It is, however, a better answer to that kind of speculation, to say that God, in his word, assures us that prayer to him is not useless—is efficacious. One of the many plain declarations to this effect, is the text, upon which I now ask you to meditate. Some of the most important points in the Bible theory of prayer are here exhibited. We will consider

- I. The character of the persons supposed to offer the prayer.
- II. The specific character of the prayer supposed to be offered.
- III. The efficacy of such prayer.

I. The character of the person is comprehensively exhibited by that significant word "righteous"—"a righteous man." We are accustomed to insist so much upon the necessity of offering our prayers in the name of Christ, and of feeling and confessing our utter unworthiness to be heard in our own name, that there



may be danger of our getting the impression that our own character has nothing to do with the efficacy of our prayers. The Scriptures teach us very differently from that. We are indeed to offer all our petitions through the Mediator, and to know that, being sinners, we can have access to God in no other name. Yet are we also to remember that Christ brings us to God no farther and no faster than he brings us away from our sins—that we have real access to God no farther than we are made to resemble him. Prayer, to have any influence or efficacy with God, must be the offering of a righteous person—a person who has the character which is described by that term, in the Bible. That it does not denote entire sinlessness, is evident from the fact that the Bible teaches us that there are no such persons on earth, while it does call some persons righteous. It is properly applicable only to those who have received God's gracious justification, and are faithfully and by his grace successfully striving to become holy. It does not mean those who think they have been converted, but are in no way better than before, any more than it means those who are satisfying themselves with their own goodness and disowning their need of Christ's atonement.

Those who have truly submitted themselves to the righteousness of God, who, by faith and repentance, have secured his gracious justification, are new creatures in Christ Jesus, are leading the new life of holiness.

That method of grace by which sinners are reconciled to God, takes effect on their character. He does not give men access to him, and influence with him, in their sins.

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," said the Psalmist—and what could more impressively exhibit God's abhorrence of the prayers of those who indulge in wicked practices—or what could be a more emphatic rejection of them, than that which is found in the first chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah? "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood."

"Wash ye, make you clean: put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." Ah! my hearers, that is plain language. We can not well mistake its meaning. God will not regard the prayers of those who live in sin, who indulge in wickedness.

If there are any of you, who have been in the habit of thinking yourselves very orthodox, and very humble Christians, because in your daily prayers you disown all idea of claiming God's favor, on the ground of your merit, and are feeling quite easy in view of your habitual sins, because it is not on the ground of your own deservings that you hope for God's favor, I would

only say to you, read the first chapter of Isaiah, to find out how God regards you, and how utterly worthless are your prayers.

If you are putting into your purse the gains of extortion, or of deceit, or keeping there the wages of unrequited labor; if you have the guilt of unredressed wrong, or of unrepented sin, on your soul, you are in no condition to offer effectual prayer to Him who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil." It is the prayer of a righteous man that avails with him. Understand then, my hearers, that if you wish to offer prevailing prayer, you must look to it that you be such persons whom God will hear. It is not enough to be careful what sort of prayers you offer—you must be careful what sort of persons you are, that offer them. Not enough that all be correct and orthodox in the prayer, nor even that you be very fervent and importunate in offering it. It behooves you to have regard to your habitual state—to your settled and permanent character. And let it be for the encouragement of all them who are humbly endeavoring to lead lives of obedience to God—trying to shape and direct all their conduct by the Bible, "seeking by patient continuance in well-doing, for glory, honor, and immortality"—let it be for the encouragement of all such, that their influence with God, in prayer, shall be in proportion to their success in these efforts to improve their character. God will hear you the more kindly, and answer you the more graciously, the more faithfully you obey him.

II. The character of the prayer itself next claims our consideration. It is "effectual fervent prayer." The Bible tells us that: "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." That which is outward and visible is apt to fix our attention, and indeed our knowledge of that which is internal and unseen is commonly derived only from that which is outward and visible. Hence we "know in part" only. Our knowledge is fragmentary and imperfect. We have a scriptural intimation that in the future world we shall know in a different way, and more perfectly, "even as also we are known." Such direct, absolute, and perfect knowledge has God always, of all subjects. He does not have to infer any thing, nor to conclude any thing by a process of argument. All his knowledge is direct, intuitive, absolute.

In this matter of prayer, we hear a man pray, and if his words are fit, and his manner solemn and earnest, we presume that his affections are warm, that his heart is engaged. But we can know the latter only as an inference from the former. Not so with God. The words, the manner, the look and tones are nothing to him. He sees the heart—directly knows the mind—has immediate observation of the spirit. What kind of prayer then ought we to expect to have influence with him—to be regarded by him—to

constitute the condition on which he will bestow specific favors? Of course this will not be determined by the outward form, or any of the sensible phenomena of prayer. The accuracy or the eloquence of its words and phrases — the decorum or the vehemence of its utterance — these can have no influence. Unless the prayer is what it seems to be, it is worse than if it did not seem to be what it does. For God will not be mocked, and any attempt to mock him must receive his frown. Prayer, then, in order to avail, must not merely seem, it must be earnest. There is, perhaps, no other word that better conveys the idea which our translators have expressed by the two words, "effectual," and "fervent." A man can have no influence with God, in prayer, unless he is in earnest. This implies (1) that he be sincere. The desire which he expresses to God must be his real desire. It must be no pretension, no hypocrisy. It is to be feared that much prayer is offered, in public and in private, that has not this character of entire sincerity. Oh! it is a high attainment to be wholly free from guile—to have the lips, and the looks, and the tones, and the whole manner always express fairly, honestly, courageously, just what the heart means. Although we know that the eye of God searches our inmost souls, and that his ear hears our most silent thoughts, we do not, it is to be feared, always so remember this, and are not always so affected by it as to save us from hypocrisy before him. The thought ought to humble us. How wretchedly perverse must the souls indeed be, that can be guilty of insincerity before such a Being, under an omniscient eye—knowing, all the while, that that eye searches them through and through. Certainly, prayer must be sincere, to have influence with him.

True earnestness in prayer also implies (2) a high appreciation of the object sought, and a strong desire for its attainment. In fact, the most prominent objects of prayer are of such a nature that we can not be perfectly sincere in our desires for them, without giving great strength to our desires. If we sincerely wish for a thing, we are likely to wish for it with a strength of desire proportioned to its perceived importance. We are then to understand that prayer has influence with God, avails to procure blessings from him, in proportion to the strength of desire with which it is offered — in proportion to its energy — not the vehemence of its audible expression, but the real intensity of the desires which prompt it. This accords with the various representations of the Bible upon this subject. God is represented as a Father, pitying his children, and disposed to do them favors: will not that disposition be in proportion to the strength of their right desires? The Saviour, by two remarkable parables, teaches us to persevere in prayer, with importunity, intimating that thus we may at length obtain that which at first seems to be refused. What but strong desire will ever lead to importunate entreaty?

The examples of successful prayer which the Bible gives us, are characterized by evident intensity of desire for the blessings sought and obtained. Jacob, wrestling with the angel, Moses interceding for the offending people, Abraham interceding for Sodom, Elijah bowing himself upon the mountain in prayer for rain, when the land had been parched with a three years' drought in answer to his previous prayer—these are instances that will readily occur to you. The New Testament writers cite some of these examples, and the whole of their representations are calculated to give us the same impression, namely, that God regards the depth and strength of desire, in those who offer prayer to him, and answers accordingly.

I might also appeal to the experience of Christians in more modern times. Those who have had the most decisive evidence that God has heard them, who have received the most evident answers to their prayers, have been those who have offered their prayers with the most fervent desires, and urged them with the greatest importunity.

It is not enough, then, that we look to our general conduct and character, and see that we be righteous persons; not enough that we be upright, and honest, and even pious, in order that our prayers may prevail. There is a specific character belonging to the prayer itself, and that character is this sacred earnestness, this holy fervor of desire, lifting the soul to God in urgent, importunate entreaty—laying hold upon him humbly yet eagerly, and with a holy boldness which he permits, like that of Jacob, of Abraham, and of Moses.

Such prayer is efficacious.

This was to be our third topic.

III. Its efficacy.—The plain and pointed declaration of the text is, that it "availeth much." It has great influence, great power, great efficacy, in obtaining blessings from God. What a decisive answer to all the cavils of skeptics, and to all the questionings of philosophy, and to all the doubts of our own feeble faith? We have it written here in this book authenticated to us as God's word, that prayer, such prayer of such persons, does avail much. And has not the voice of the great God power to silence our questionings and to banish our doubts? Will we be tossed and shaken by speculations about that upon which he has given so clear and decisive utterance? Thus invited and thus assured, can we not carry our petitions to him, expecting to prevail?

Here the question can hardly fail to arise in our minds whether we are such persons, and whether our prayers are of such a character as would entitle us to this confidence, according to the instruction of the text and of the Bible at large. Yet it would not be as wise to occupy ourselves with this inquiry, looking back-

ward on the past, as with that dealing with ourselves before God, by which we may make good our title to the assurance of this text for the future.

How strong is the motive here presented to upright, holy, godly living—to the putting away from us of all sin—to the steadfast continuance in efforts to obey God—to that following after God which consists in faithful, constant, affectionate obedience—to that patient and careful self-discipline, and that humble subjection of ourselves to God's appointed means of grace whereby the soul is sanctified! In proportion to our success in these efforts will be our influence with the Most High in prayer. The more holy we become, the more near access shall we gain to him, and the more prevalent will be our intercessions with him.

How also shall we secure in ourselves that earnestness in prayer which is essential to its efficacy? Doubtless all our successful efforts for the general improvement of our Christian character will help us in this respect. The more thorough and decided and deep-toned is our piety, the greater will be our susceptibility of such earnestness in prayer, the greater our readiness to be affected by those considerations that are fitted to awaken such fervent desires within us. But besides this general and permanent preparation of our hearts, there are practical measures by which we can awaken our interest in those objects for which we ought especially to pray.

Take, for example, the object which was presented by Paul, in an affecting request for the prayers of his Christian brethren, "that the word of God may have free course and be glorified." That certainly is an appropriate and scriptural subject of prayer; it is one for which we have every reason to believe that the earnest prayer of the righteous would "avail much." It is a practical question of the very highest importance how can we secure in ourselves appropriately earnest desires for that so great blessing?

We can at least direct our contemplations towards it. We can seriously consider it. We can look at it in its several important and affecting aspects; we can regard the condition of the community in which we live; we can think of the sad state and prospects of the impenitent; we can consider the lamentable prevalence of error and of sin; we can see the adaptation of God's word, when made efficacious, to remedy the evils existing among us, and to transform and save the souls of these impenitent people. And when these things are brought before our minds, when our steady contemplation is directed upon them, will they not affect us with fervent desire for the putting forth of God's own power to give effect to his word? Can we, hoping in Christ for ourselves, see our friends without hope, and not feel interested for them? Can we, loving Christ, see his cause languishing without earnest desire for the revival of his work? Can we look over the community and take a fair view of its religious condition, and not



feel ourselves prompted to cry with strongest importunity to God to open the windows of heaven, and to rain righteousness upon us?

Surely it becomes us to give our minds to such contemplations, and to try if our hearts will not be thus affected. Let us remember too, that appropriate efforts in this cause will strongly tend to increase our interest in it. God has not designed that we should pray for the putting forth of his energy for the promotion of his work without putting forth our own in appropriate labors for the same end. Nor does it seem to be according to his arrangement that we should be able to pray with fervor and with faith for that for which we are not willing, in every appropriate way, to exert ourselves. Humble prayer and obedient effort are wont to go together. They promote each other. If then, you are conscious that your prayers are wanting in appropriate fervor, address yourselves to faithful and patient labors, and if you find yourselves feeble and inefficient in labors, let that send you back to prayers, and let your prayers and labors thus be united that labor may excite you to more fervent prayer, and prayer may strengthen you for more vigorous labor, and that God may, consistently with his revealed plan, pour out his Spirit upon you, and abundantly bless and prosper your efforts to advance his cause.

Remember also that there is nothing in which you may more certainly have his help than in this very matter of prayer. "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which can not be uttered." If we will submit ourselves to the Spirit's guidance; if we will be obedient to his promptings; if we will, in humility, seek his help, he will help our infirmities, and will teach us to pray in such a manner that our prayers will be heard and graciously answered.

## THE PRAYER-MEETING.

---

### Fulton-Street Prayer-Meeting.

THIS sacred and consecrated spot continues from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, to be a scene of unutterable interest for the answers to prayer, and for the fervent supplications which go up for spiritual blessings on immortal souls.

**A PRISONER'S TESTIMONY.**—The speaker said he had been seven months a close prisoner of war in the Parish prison of New-Orleans—a vile hole, full of all sorts of abominations—a place of filth and disease, in which he was deprived of all the comforts and many of the necessities of life. The men there confined, like himself, knew not what was before them. They knew, however, that if they remained there through the hot season, they would most likely be all carried out corpses. There was profanity, and blasphemy, and obscenity all around them. There was a despotism in their treatment received at the hands of their keepers, which was hard to bear.

But in the midst of all these things, he must say that he had enjoyed more in a single day in that Parish prison in New-Orleans than in any other single day in his whole life.

"You will ask," said the speaker, "how this can be? Let me tell you. It was in answer to prayer. We had a prayer-meeting among the prisoners. We had the approaches to the throne of grace in our possession, and we occupied them. We had such prayer-meetings as you would scarcely expect to find elsewhere. Men here have spoken of the blessedness

of faith, as well as of its importance. We had that faith of which mention is made in this meeting in lively exercise. We had blessed times, I can assure you. We committed our all to God, and we felt that we could trust him. We did trust him. You never saw such trust any where, and know nothing about it, unless you have been in like trials. A man can never know what his faith is until it appears under trial. Here at your homes, with your families around you, and all your wants supplied, and abundance of the choicest comforts of life poured into your bosoms, what can you know of the trial of your faith?

"But be shut up in a loathsome prison, with enemies for keepers, who were blood-thirsty and cruel, surrounded by vices more abhorrent than the abounding diseases and death, and you may begin to apprehend something of the trial of your faith. Then let you be found rejoicing in God by reason of your faith, and trust in him, so that you are made to feel that your happiest days before are nothing to be compared with your happiness in that prison—then you can talk of faith in God.

"We had our daily prayer-meetings. Many were awakened, and a large number were converted. Oh! those were sweet, blessed days. Sinners were found coming to Jesus day by day, and we rejoiced with exceeding joy over their conversion. The joy of this faith is more than I can describe. It must be felt in order to be known. It is triumphant joy. It is joy in full assurance of hope, when

there is not a single outward sign to justify it. It is believing in God, and taking him at his word. I am glad to know that this blessed place of prayer bears witness to this faith. It is that which lends an indescribable charm to this place."

---

For The Prayer-Meeting.

### Feeding the Lambs.

A PREACHER and pastor, on coming out of church one Sabbath, after preaching a learned and elaborate discourse, was accosted by a pious elder, who said to the minister, in a kindly tone: "Dear sir, be careful not to put the hay so high in the rack that the lambs can't reach it." Many sermons shoot over the heads of many common people, much more over the heads of children. The parables, the plain and beautiful illustrations which the Saviour employed in speaking to the crowds who attended on his ministry, are models to be followed by modern ministers. Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost is a striking instance of the simple power of truth, plain, direct, pungent, with no efforts at oratory.

I know one minister (but would like to know hundreds of the same pattern) with whom it is quite a common thing to say, "Now, I have a word here for my young friends," or something similar. Then comes a simplification of what has been addressed to the older hearers, or a new point suited to the little folks, or a practical appeal to them, graced and pointed with figures and narratives which commend them to the juvenile part of the congregation. Why should a habit of this kind be found in only one here and another there, with miles of manuscript and whole Sabbaths of speaking between, in which the world is falsely assumed to be peopled with adults, and adults alone?

This forgetfulness or neglect of the young must come to a conclusive end. They are there in the pews, with their lively intellects and warm hearts. Let them be spoken to. Let every minister, as he prays, as he studies the Bible, as he consults books, as he bends over his manuscript-page, bethink himself of what he has for the little ones, and so get some food ready for them. Nay, more—as he skims the newspaper, walks the streets, visits among his people, goes among the rich, the poor, the strong, the sick, the rejoicing, the sorrowing, let him cull materials for the bairns. So will his pulpit-work be not less acceptable or profitable to the grown people, and he will reach a wider circle than he reached before. I know a little boy, six years old, who is frequently asked, when he returns from church: "Well, what did the minister say?" His answer on one occasion was: "He said, 'let us pray.'" This was uttered after a pause full of careful reflection.

---

### Ministerial Counsels.

1. THE ministerial office is the continuation of the prophetic office of Christ, or the organ through which Christ himself perpetuates his ministerial power. Hence ministers of the Gospel are called, after their official character, ambassadors in Christ's stead, (2 Cor. 5 : 20;) ministers (servants) of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, (1 Cor. 4 : 1;) co-workers with God, (1 Cor. 3 : 9;) the salt of the earth and the light of the world, (Matt. 5 : 13-16.)

2. The office of the ministry is the most exalted and honorable vocation; for it was the work of the Son of God and of his Apostles, the greatest teachers and benefactors of mankind on earth. It is also the most responsible and weighty office, because it treats of the weal or woe

of immortal souls. It is further the most culpable and abhorrent profession, if it be followed under the promptings of worldly gain and ambition, without faith and love to Christ.

3. A preacher must have a double call—an inner one from the Holy Spirit, and an outer one from the authorities of the Church. Without such a call, he has no ministerial authority, and becomes as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

4. The controlling motive of the true minister is love to Christ and undying souls. "The love of God constraineth us," saith Paul.

5. The highest example of the ministry, both in doctrine and walk, is Jesus Christ, and next to him stands the Apostle Paul.

6. In the preparation and delivery of your sermons, aim alone at pleasing God and saving souls.

7. A preacher without faith is like a statue without heart and eyes, and a sun without light and warmth; yea, like a sword without an edge, and a body without a soul.

8. Preach to yourself before you preach to others, and your exhortation will impress your hearers with double power.

9. The evangelical sermon is a living and experimental witness of Christ as the only and all-sufficient Saviour of sinners, for the awakening and edification of those who hear it. It is not mere teaching and exhortation, but the communication of the Christian life. What comes from the heart goes to the heart, and life begets life.

10. The true sermon has an anointing of the Holy Spirit, which accomplishes more than either learning or eloquence.

11. Each sermon should be the work both of the study and the pulpit. At home, under the influence of silent prayer and faithful study, it

is begotten; in the church, under the stimulus of the inspiring countenances of attentive hearers, it is born.

12. Never preach without earnestness and thorough preparation, if you can possibly get time. Thus alone will you grow daily in richness of thought and the power of delivery. True industry never goes unrewarded, but indolence can claim no promise.

13. He who accustoms himself too early to extemporizing, and relies upon his own powers, will soon exhaust his store, and weary both himself and his auditors.

14. In your preparations examine first the text, together with the best standard literary aids within your reach, among which the Bible itself is the best, then select the principal thought for your theme, and divide it into its necessary parts. A simple, clear, and well-disposed arrangement constitutes already half the sermon. Frequently, however, the theme is first chosen, and the text to suit it selected afterwards.

15. The Bible is astonishingly rich in texts for all possible themes which are appropriate to the pulpit, and tend to edification.

16. The text should not be merely the motto, but the life-blood and soul of the whole discourse.

17. The different parts must not be united externally and mechanically, but they ought, if possible, to grow out of each other from an internal necessity, so that the whole sermon might constitute a living organism.

18. Never forget the old proverb that the Word of God is like an odoriferous plant, which imparts the stronger fragrance the more it is rubbed, and like a richly laden fruit-tree, which, the more it is shaken, the more fruit it yields.

19. Do not permit yourself to be unnecessarily disturbed and distract-

ed before going into the pulpit, but lock yourself up in your closet, so that your discourse may receive, through prayer and the concentration of your mind, the baptism of the spirit of fire.

20. Forget every thing in the pulpit except God and the salvation of sinners.

21. Remember every time you preach that it may be the last opportunity which your hearers may have of hearing the word of life and saving their souls.—REV. DR. SCHAFF.

#### Prayerless Parents.

PRAYERLESS parents! Your irreligion may prove your children's ruin. They might have been within the fold of the Saviour by this time, had not you hindered them when entering in. That time when God visited your family with a heavy stroke, they were thoughtful for a season, but there was no church in your house to give a heavenly direction to that thoughtfulness, and it soon died away. That evening, when they came home from the Sabbath-school, so serious, if you had been a pious father or mother, you would have taken your boy aside, and spoken tenderly to him, and asked what his teacher had been telling him, and you would have prayed with him and tried to deepen the impression. But your children came in from the church or school and found no church in their father's house. Their hearts were softened, but your worldliness soon hardened them. The seed of the kingdom was just springing in their souls, and by this time might have been a rich harvest of salvation; but in the atmosphere of your ungodly house the tender blade withered instantly. Your idle talk, your frivolity, your Sunday visitors, your prayerless evenings ruined all. Your children

were coming to Christ, and you suffered them not. And you will not need to hinder them long. The carnal mind is enmity against God; but no enmity so deep as theirs who were almost reconciled and then drew back. You drove your children back. You hardened them. They may never more be moved. They may grow up as prayerless and ungodly as yourself. If God should change yourself, they may soon be too hard for your own tears and entreaties. If you die as you are, their evil works will follow you to the world of woe, and pour new ingredients into your own cup of wrath. Oh! think of these things. A prayerless house is not only a cheerless one, but it is a guilty one; for where God is not, there Satan is.

#### Christ Alone.

"MEN and brethren, what shall we do?" These are the words of men who are at a total loss; it is the voice of poor, distressed souls, that saw themselves in misery, but knew not, saw not, nor could devise any way of escape from it, by any thing they could do for themselves, or any other creature for them. And hence the Apostle uses that emphatic word, "Shut up to the faith," as men besieged and distressed in a garrison in time of a storm, when the enemy pours in upon them through the breaches and overpowers them. There is but one sally-port or gate, at which they can escape, and to that they all throng, as despairing of life, if they take any other course. Just so do men's convictions besiege them, distress them, beat them off from all their holds and intrenchments, and bring them to a pinching distress in themselves, shutting them up to Christ as the only way of escape. Duties can not save me; reformation can not



save me, nor angels, nor men can save me; there is no way but one—*Christ*, or condemnation forever. I thought once, that a little repentance, reformation, restitution, and a stricken life might be a way to escape wrath to come, but I find the bed is too short, and the covering too narrow. All is but loss, dung, dross, in comparison with Jesus Christ. If I trust to those *Egyptian reeds*, they will not only fail me, but pierce and wound me too; I see no hope within the whole horizon of sense.—JOHN FLAVEL.

#### Beginning Family Prayer.

THE commencement of this sacred and delightful duty must often be attended by difficulties where the head of the family has for years neglected it. "I have never done any thing since I became a Christian," writes one, "which required so much self-denial, and which was so truly a bearing of the cross, as beginning family worship. I felt that it was a duty from the time that I devoted myself to the service of Christ; but I shrunk from its performance so painfully, that day after day and week after week passed away without my attempting it. At length conscience remonstrated so loudly, and my conviction that it was a sin to neglect it so long was so strong, I determined to make the effort to perform it the next morning, cost what it would. It occasioned me a wakeful night; again and again I implored strength from on high. I was constitutionally timid, and when the morning came was much agitated.

"Before breakfast I said to my wife: 'I feel, C., as if we ought to have prayer in the family. We all have souls to be saved, and need God's blessing. I am sure you will

not object to it.' 'No,' she replied; but the tone in which she said it was not encouraging. When we rose from the breakfast-table it seemed to me the children had never been so noisy before, and it required an effort to request them to keep silence and be seated. They did so, but I felt that their eyes were fixed wonderingly on me. I took the large Bible from the shelf and sat down. I wished to preface the service with some remarks, but I could not trust my voice, and I opened the book and read the first chapter that presented itself. I then knelt, and with faltering voice began to address the Creator. But my hesitation soon passed off. I know not why it was, but during the performance of the service my soul was so filled with thoughts of God's great goodness in permitting me to approach him, and to place myself and those dear to me under the shelter of his protecting love, that I forgot the presence of others, and poured out my heart in supplications for his blessing with as much freedom and fervor as I had ever done in secret. When I arose I perceived my wife's eyes were moistened with tears.

"The conflict was over, the duty was entered on, and the peace which follows the consciousness of having done right came into my heart. Prayer with my beloved ones was no longer a burden, but a delightful privilege; and ere long I had the satisfaction of knowing that the heart of my companion ascended in full unison with my own to the throne of grace. I can now speak freely in my family of the value and sweetness of this service, and to many of them I believe the hour of prayer has become one of the most highly prized of all the day brings us."